

# WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



## Foster Youth and Higher Education Initiative John Seita Scholars Program

March 3, 2009



WMU's first class of Seita Scholars (n=51)

- **HOME COUNTIES:** Kent, Wayne, Kalamazoo, Macomb, Ingham, Oakland, Allegan, Genesee, Ottawa, Lenawee, Muskegon, Saginaw, Washtenaw
- **GENDER:** 24 females, 27 males
- **RACE:** 32 Black Non-Hispanic, 14 White Non-Hispanic, 4 American-Indian, 1 Hispanic
- **AGE:** 17–25 years old
- **MAJORS:** Art, Aviation, Biology, Biomedical Sciences, Business, Communication, Criminal Justice, Education, Engineering, Exercise Science, Geography, History, Music, Nursing, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, Social Work, Theater

### WMU Milestones for the Foster Youth & Higher Education Initiative

APR 2007: Summit meeting on Foster Youth and Higher Education sponsored by DHS and MCC  
AUG 2007: John Seita Tuition Scholarship created  
FALL 2007: Met with academic and student support units on campus to discuss program idea  
SEPT 2007: Formalized a planning committee (on and off-campus partners)  
OCT 2007: WMU hosted regional meeting that was a follow-up to the April Summit  
NOV 2007: Student Advisory Group formed (8 WMU students from foster care involved in program planning)  
JAN 2008: Held a campus wide meeting inviting academic and student support departments  
FEB 2008: Launched [www.wmich.edu/fyit](http://www.wmich.edu/fyit) website and publicized scholarship  
AUG 2008: Welcomed 52 Seita Scholars to WMU's Campus!  
NOV 2008: Formalized Director Position for the John Seita Scholars Program  
JAN 2009: Hired first full-time "Campus Coach," clinically trained staff  
SPR 2009: Best Practice – Cycle of Teaching and Learning

### The John Seita Scholars Program

**The goal of the WMU Foster Youth & Higher Education Initiative is to increase opportunities for foster youth to pursue higher education and to provide supports that promote success and well-being throughout the undergraduate experience at WMU. The primary objective of the Seita Scholars program is to promote academic success toward college graduation, while maintaining personal well-being, developing career aspirations, and building leadership capabilities. The program has three main components:**

**1. Student Outreach and Recruitment:** 20 percent of foster youth who graduate high school enroll in college, compared to 60 percent of non-foster youth. WMU recruits young people who are "aging out" to be part of the Bronco family. We provide students, foster parents, high school counselors, caseworkers and other adults supporting foster youth with information on resources and steps on how to go to college.

**2. Student Retention and Well-being:** 10 percent of foster youth earn a college degree in 6 years, compared to 24 percent of non-foster youth. More than providing these students with support toward an undergraduate education, we are developing a strategy to help former foster youth transition into adulthood through the experience of higher education and by developing a “community of scholars.”

**3. Student Graduation and Career Transition:** 100 percent of foster youth will have emancipated from DHS by the time they reach college graduation. Since these young adults do not have the opportunity to “move back home” while considering career options, efforts toward career planning and preparation must begin early in their academic careers.

#### **Key Program Supports**

- Campus Coaches (24 hour on call support, meeting student needs at locations and times that are convenient to the student)
- Student care packages (welcome, exam, holiday)
- Campus housing (year round)
- Financial aid and financial planning assistance
- Work study, employee skill development
- Academic assessment, support and monitoring
- Campus engagement and social connections
- Cultural and personal identity development
- Leadership development; career mentoring
- Healthy living; physical and mental health care
- Support with other systems (e.g., courts, human services, Medicaid, public assistance)

#### **Partners (to date):**

- **Campus Partners:** Advising, AFSCME 1668 (service union), Alpha program, Student Advisory Group, Department of Admissions, Department of Financial Aid, Career and Student Employment Services; Children’s Trauma Assessment Center (CTAC), Counseling and Testing Center; Dean of Students, Dining Services, Disabled Student Resources & Services, Division of Multicultural Affairs, English, First Year Experience, MLK Academy, Office of Conduct, WMU Police, Residence Life, Sindecuse Health Center, Student Success Program, University Curriculum.
- **Community Partners:** Michigan Department of Human Services, Lutheran Social Services (Educational Training Voucher), Foster Care Youth Boards, DCH Medicaid, Community volunteers, Foster care agencies.

**Outcomes:** The Seita Scholars program is student-centered, theory-based and data-driven program. Based on the 51 students who entered in fall 2008, a sample of student outcomes after the first semester includes:

- 94% enrolled through to end of Fall 2008 semester
- 55% withdrew from one or more courses during the semester
- 50% with a GPA at 2.0 or higher (3 students on Dean’s Honors List)
- 71% with one or more courses below a C letter grade
- 78% continued enrollment through to Spring semester

#### **Present Challenges**

- **Students:** academic preparation, social transition, and engage.
- **Health Care Arena:** Medicaid ends on 21<sup>st</sup> birthday; physical, dental, mental, emotional
- **Child Welfare Arena:** Preparation, academic readiness, continued support.
- **Higher Education Arena:** Partnering with child welfare agencies; interrupted educational trajectories

#### *WMU’s John Seita Scholarship*

- *Full-tuition for WMU undergraduate degree.*
- *Students reside on campus.*
- *Housing, fees, books and other living expenses are paid for by ETV and financial aid.*
- *An ETV-eligible student who has no debt, maintains above a 2.0 GPA, budgets wisely, and meets application deadlines can graduate with a Bachelor’s degree with no or low student loans.*
- *Seita Scholars program.*